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SUBJECT: TURKEY: NEW MILITARY CHIEF'S FIRST POLICY SPEECH
FOCUSSES ON DOMESTIC POLITICS, POSITIVE ON US

REF: A. ANKARA 1392

¶B. 05 ANKARA 2911

Classified By: DCM Douglas Silliman, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During new Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief Ikler Basbug's nationally televised speech at his August 28 change of command ceremony, Basbug:

-- Highlighted the importance of US-Turkey bilateral relations and preserving the "perfect level of cooperation" against the PKK;

-- Voiced clear support for Turkey's EU accession but called on the EU to treat Turkey fairly;

-- Expressed strong support for Iraq's territorial integrity, called on the GOI and KRG to take effective action against the PKK, and stressed that Kirkuk should be given "special status"

-- Emphasized that a solution to Cyprus should be found within the UN framework, that there must be recognition of the TRNC as an equal and sovereign partner, and that Turkey's role as a Guarantor Power be recognized.

-- Stressed the importance of preserving Turkey as a unified and secular state and cautioned against groups trying to impose their religious identity in public life; and

-- Warned against granting ethnic groups (read Kurds) special status.

Basbug also delivered a farewell speech as commander of Turkish Land Forces on August 27, providing a cogent analysis of the importance of non-military measures to defeat PKK terrorism.

¶2. (C) Basbug's strong and positive statement about US-Turkey relations echoed remarks he made during his tenure as Deputy Commander of the TGS from 2003 to 2005 (ref. b). His willingness to speak out in favor of bilateral relations will be helpful in confronting anti-American policy sentiments that are reportedly on the rise within military ranks, and bodes well for bilateral military relations during the course of his tenure. Basbug also made clear that the military continues to see itself as a stakeholder in Turkey's EU accession process and the ultimate defender of Turkey's national unity and secular identity. End summary.

Warnings Against Religious Communities, Ethnic Identity

¶13. (U) The bulk of Basbug's August 28 speech -- attended by President Gul, PM Erdogan, Parliament Speaker Toptan, TRNC "President" Talat and the top military brass -- focused on Turkey's identity as a secular, unitary nation state as established by Ataturk, and how these fundamental pillars of the Turkish Republic must not be violated. He noted that "some parts of Turkish society" are concerned about the rise of religious influence, and warned specifically against the rising influence of religious communities and their efforts to shape politics and society with "a life style based on religion." Basbug highlighted Articles 24 and 174 of the 1982 Turkish constitution (drafted by the military following the 1980 coup) as the guiding definition of secularism. (Note: Article 24 prohibits the "exploitation of religious feelings for personal or political purposes"; Article 174 makes the key reforms instituted by Ataturk permanent. End Note).

¶14. (U) While noting Turkey's respect for cultural differences, Basbug stressed that no one could ask or expect Turkey to make "collective arrangements for a certain ethnic group" beyond the cultural domain by disguising them as democratic demands. Some view this as a direct rejection of EU demands for Turkey to extend additional cultural and political rights to Kurds and reflects fears within the military that providing additional rights to minorities will eventually undermine Turkey's unity and pave the way for calls for Kurdish independence.

Positive on Relations with US

¶15. (C) Although Turkey-US relations only received a brief mention, Basbug's message was clear and positive. He said the relationship is based on shared values and is "too multifaceted and deeply rooted to gauge the relationship on any one issue." On the intelligence sharing cooperation against the PKK, Basbug said there is a "perfect level of cooperation and understanding," and that one of his important responsibilities is to ensure that this cooperation continues.

¶16. (C) During a September 2 meeting with a visiting Staffdel Makovsky (reported septel), newly appointed TGS J5 LTG Nusret Tasdeler echoed Basbug's statement about the importance of the bilateral relationship. Tasdeler stressed that Basbug has made clear to his staff that improving relations with the US will be a priority during his tenure.

Support for EU Accession

¶17. (U) Contrary to pervasive anti-EU sentiments within the military, Basbug voiced clear support for Turkey's EU accession. He stated that the Turkish Armed Forces is a symbol and supporter of modernism and progress. For the Turkish military, EU membership is an important tool in achieving Ataturk's goal for Turkey to be amongst the most advanced nations. Basbug's support for Turkey's EU accession is not without caveat, however. He expects the EU to treat Turkey on an equal footing with other countries and "to refrain from demands" that would undermine Turkey's "unitary structure" and status as a nation state. (Comment: While recognizing the importance of EU membership for the modernization of Turkey, many Turks (both secularists and nationalists) fear that the demands the EU is placing on Turkey, especially on issues related to religion and minorities, will threaten Turkey's unity and secular identity. End Comment)

¶18. (U) Basbug presented an exceptionalist view of Turkey's status within Europe. Stressing the unique and pressing security challenges facing Turkey (including Caucasus, Iran,

Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and the Middle East), Basbug stated that both Turkey's location and its status as "the only democratic and secular country in the region" are important. He warned that if Turkey is not accepted as a full EU member, the EU's influence would end in the Balkans and not reach the Middle East or the Caucasus.

Tough line on Cyprus

¶ 19. (U) Basbug emphasized the importance of finding a comprehensive, just and permanent solution within the UN framework, and articulated TGS' long-standing position regarding the Cyprus issue. Specifically, Basbug said if a solution is to be found, all sides should acknowledge: 1) the Greek Cypriot administration does not constitute the Cyprus Republic that was established by the agreements of 1959 and 1960; 2) the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is a reality; and 3) a solution cannot be found without recognizing the Turkish Cypriots as equal and sovereign and Turkey's status as a Guarantor State.

Message to GOI, KRG

¶ 110. (U) Noting that Turkey has the most to lose if Iraq is divided, Basbug stated that Iraq's territorial integrity and sovereignty is a priority for Turkey. He urged coordination and unity of effort within the GOT in its relations with Iraq, and asserted that the basic challenge in Iraq is to find a fair resolution in the sharing of political power and revenues. He warned against the KRG taking action to undermine Iraq's territorial and political integrity. Basbug also called for Kirkuk to be granted "special status," arguing that the Iraq situation will be "unresolvable for everyone" otherwise. He also expressed his expectation for the GOI and KRG to take effective measures against the PKK in northern Iraq. TGS J5 chief Tasdeler told Staffdel Makovsky on September 2 that the TGS assesses that the KRG and GOI, despite numerous promises made at the political level, has done next to nothing in constraining the PKK.

Military Alone Cannot Defeat Terrorism

¶ 111. (U) In his August 27 farewell remarks as Turkish Land Forces Commander, Basbug focused on the struggle against terrorism and expounded on his view that the PKK terrorist threat cannot be defeated by military power alone. He emphasized the need to combine military power with political, economic, "socio-cultural" (to include education and health), and psychological measures in a coordinated, unified approach to drain support for the PKK. Basbug also stressed that Turkey needs to continue to work with international partners to defeat the PKK.

Media Reactions

¶ 112. (U) Media reaction was generally critical of Basbug for focusing his speech on secularism, globalization and its limits, and the danger of granting collective political rights based on ethnic identity. International relations professor and commentator Ihsan Dagi said it would have been more appropriate for Basbug to focus on the emerging threats in the region and what the military is doing to prepare to respond to these challenges instead of focusing on domestic issues and the challenges of globalization.